Justification By Faith

- PRAYER – **NEED song "And Can it BE."**

Introduction

- **READ Romans 1:16-17, 3:9 – 4:8**
- In recent studies, our attention has been focused on how our Savior's work of redemption **is applied to us personally**.
- The application of redemption **starts with God's call** to come to the Savior for mercy.
- Scripture clearly states that this call goes out to all people, but **not all respond. However, the call** of God is effective for those who have been ordained to receive eternal life. They do come!
- We said that the nature of sin is such that men can NOT come on their own! Man is "**Dead in trespasses and sins**" (Ephesians 2:1). God must intervene, and He does so by His grace and power in the new birth. **This is called the work of regeneration**.
- In **Regeneration, man is awakened by the Holy Spirit to that fact that he or she is a sinner.**
- This results in a willingness to **turn from sin (repentance) to Christ (faith), which** Is, in essence, the definition of conversion.
- Now, what is next in God's wonderful work of salvation?
- **What's next is the important matter of our standing before God.**
- **Romans 8:30:** "**Those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified**.
- Our subject today, in this order of salvation, **is the great truth of justification by faith**.
- **In other words, what about my relationship with God**?
- **I am still a sinner, so how do I know I have peace with God?**

- James Buchanan, a minister in the Church of Scotland during the 18th century, **wrote regarding this need we all have for the removal of our guilt due to sin**:

"**Guilt cannot be extinguished by repentance or even by regeneration; for while these may improve or renew our character, a divine sentence of condemnation can only be reversed by a divine act of remission. And sin, we must remind ourselves again, involves not only pollution but 'guilt.' It involves divine condemnation. The application of redemption then must embrace removal of guilt no less than the removal of defilement. <u>It must involve a change in God's judicial relation to us as well as change in our attitude to God</u>.**"

- Justification addresses the critical question of how guilty sinners can be right with a Holy God. Romans 1:18 tells us, "**The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all wickedness of men**."

- **Romans 3:10:** "**There is no one righteous, not even one**."

- **This is NOT an academic matter! It is an urgent question**! So much so that it is the major theme of the early chapters of the Epistle to the Romans.

- This great truth played such a critical and **central role in the Protestant Reformation.**

- **Martin Luther**, one of the leading figures in the early phases of the protestant reformation, **anguished over his sinful heart**.

- For many months, he **felt a deep sense of guilt before God**. He was a monk in one of the strictest Roman Catholic orders at the time. **He slept on hard floors and regularly fasted; once, when in Rome, he climbed a hard staircase while kneeling**. He went to the priests daily to confess his sins, attended masses, and did anything he thought might get rid of his sense of guilt. Nothing worked!

- One day, while meditating on **Romans 1:17, "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written, the righteous will live by faith."**

- Luther began to see that **it is NOT his own righteousness, (which he knew he didn't have), but rather the merits of Christ that makes him right with God. This is received by faith.**

- At that point, when Luther came to see the biblical teaching on justification.

- These are Luther's words describing his experience, "**I had greatly longed to understand Paul's epistle to the Romans, and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, "the righteousness of God," because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and acts righteously in punishing the unrighteous. Night and day I pondered until I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby through grace and sheer mercy, he justifies us by faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors in to paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the righteousness of God had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in great love. This passage of Paul became to me a gateway into heaven**."

Definition

- So, what is justification by faith? How might we define it?

- **Definition - "Justification is an instantaneous legal act of God in which He views our sins as forgiven, Christ's righteousness as belonging to us, and declares us righteous in His sight.**

- To attempt to dig into this definition this morning, we will use the following divisions for our study.

1. **Justification includes a legal declaration by God.**

2. **God declares us to be Righteous in His Sight because He imputes Christ's Righteousness to Us.**

3. **Justification comes to us entirely by God's grace, NOT on account of any merit in ourselves.**

4. **God justifies us through faith in Christ.**

Justification includes a legal declaration by God.

- First of all Justification includes a **<u>legal declaration</u>** by God.

- When we hear the term justification, we should immediately consider judicial action. **A judgment has been made**. That is consistent in both the Old and New Testaments.

- In the Old Testament, the Hebrew term for "**to justify**" in most instances **means that a person's legal position or status meets the demands of the law**. Examples:

- **Deuteronomy 25:1:** "**When men have a dispute, they are to take it to court, and the judges will decide the case, acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty." The action of acquitting is to justify. It is the opposition of condemning**!

- The King James might actually be of more help here. "**If there be a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment, that [the judges] may judge them; then they shall justify the righteous and condemn the wicked**."

- **In this example the judge does NOT make someone righteous or does NOT make someone wicked**. That is not his job. His job is to give a just judgment.

- **They were to declare someone righteous, or they were to condemn the wicked. The judge was establishing the person's legal status.**

- **The Greek verb "to justify" is used similarly in the New Testament** and the Old Testament.

- **There is a declaration. Often, it is contrasted against condemnation**.

- **Matthew 12:36-37** "**But I tell you that men will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for every careless word they have spoken. [37] For by your words you will be acquitted (justified), and by your words you will be condemned**."

- **Once again, we see in this a legal status being established: either justification or condemnation.**

- The Apostle Paul also contrasts condemnation and justification in Romans 5.

- **<u>Rom 5:16</u>: "...on the one hand the judgment arose from the transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification**."

- It is important to show this because the New Testament's teaching on justification by faith, especially in the early chapters of Romans, uses the **term justify as a <u>legal declaration</u>**.

- **It pertains to a judgment. A verdict, if you would.**

- **It does NOT change a person like regeneration does!**

- **A person is still who they are. But of utmost importance, it changes a person's status**!

- John Murray writes, "**Regeneration is an act of God in us; justification is a judgment of God with respect to us. The distinction is like that of the distinction between the acts of a surgeon and the act of a judge. The surgeon, when he removes an inward cancer, does something in us. That is not what a judge does; he gives a verdict regarding our judicial status**."

- **So, justification is, first of all, a legal declaration. It does not make us holy or upright. That is what is known as definitive sanctification!**

- God, and God alone, can make a declaration in justification. Mankind is completely unable to do that on their own!

- **Now, what is it that God declares?**

God declares us <u>Righteous in His Sight Because He Imputes Christ's Righteousness to Us.</u>

- If we are Christians, this should stir up our hearts in praise to God! God declares us to be just in His Sight.

- **God declares us to be Righteous in His sight**.

- This declaration of being just in God's sight has two important components, which go hand in hand.

- **1) God declares that we have no penalty to pay for sin**! **That includes the past, present, and future**!

- Romans 8:1 "**Therefore, there is now NO condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.**"

- **Justification removes the guilt of sin!** <u>**No condemnation**</u>!

- In the words of our **hymn,** "And can it be"!

- "**No condemnation now I dread; Jesus, and all in Him, is mine; Alive in Him, my living Head, and clothed in righteousness divine**."

- **Romans 8:33** "**Who will bring a charge again those whom God has chosen? It is God that justifies. Who is he that condemns**?"

- **So God declares that those who are justified have their sins forgiven. No condemnation. Not guilty!**

- **In the words of Psalm 32, quoted by the Apostle in Romans chapter 4:7-8**

"Blessed are they whose <u>transgressions are forgiven</u>, whose sins are covered. [8] blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him."

- **It does NOT stop there! In addition to declaring His people NOT guilty, <u>God also declares them to be righteous in His sight</u>!**

- **Now, the question that needs to be asked is how God can declare us to be not guilty but righteous when, in fact, we are unrighteous and guilty sinners.**

- **The glorious answer is that He can do so because <u>He imputes Christ's Righteousness to Us!</u>**

- Now, what does that mean? We don't use or hear the word "**impute"** very often!

- **Romans 4:1-3 helps us understand the term impute.**

- **"What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? [2] If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. [3] What does the Scripture say?**
  "**Abraham believed God, and it was <u>credited to him</u> as righteousness**."

- The Apostle refers to Genesis 15, when God told Abraham to count the stars. God told Abraham, who was old and had no children, that your offspring would be as abundant as the number of stars!

- **"Abraham believed God, and it was <u>credited to him</u> as righteousness."**

- In this same passage of Romans, the Apostle Paul uses another example from David's words in Psalm 32.

"**Now, when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. [5] However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. [6] David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: [7] "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. [8] Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him**."

- To impute Christ's Righteousness to us is the glorious truth that **God views, or reckons, the perfect righteousness and obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ as belonging to us!**

- He credits Christ's righteousness to our account!

- Righteousness, of course, is the standard that God requires from all mankind! The problem, of course, **<u>is all mankind is not righteous</u>**!

- That is why we so desperately need the perfect righteousness of Christ credited to our account!

- **The concept and activity of imputation is NOT only found in justification**.

- **Can you think of other examples in Scripture?**

- Adam's guilt extended to all that followed him. **Romans 5:18-19 "Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous**".

- So, justification by faith teaches us that God credits righteousness to our account!

- **Once again we should remind ourselves these are <u>NOT academic truths</u>**.

- These are life-changing truths! No wonder Martin Luther, when he understood this great doctrine by faith, could say, "**I felt myself to have gone through open doors into paradise**?"

- Do you see why justification by faith is such a wonderful truth? God is Just yet still justifies the ungodly sinner and credits the obedience and righteousness of Jesus to us!

- **We see that God not only declares us righteous, but, in John Murray's <u>words, He constitutes us to have a righteous status</u>**.

- **In the words of Romans 5:17, it is the "gift of righteousness."**

- **What should our response be? 'O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise!!'**

- To summarize this section, **God declares us to be just or righteous not based on our actual condition of righteousness but rather on our Savior's perfect righteousness.**

- **This is the heart of the gospel and was a key battle in the protestant reformation**.

- **The Roman Catholic Church taught that righteousness was infused in justification (actually put into us). The Protestant Reformers tenaciously believed in the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus.**

- **That leads us to our next section.**

Justification comes to us entirely by God's grace, NOT on account of any merit in ourselves.

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- **In Romans 1:18 – through 3:20, God's Word teaches that all people, both Jews and Gentiles, are sinful. The question is, how can they be made right with God?**

- The natural human response is to try to obey God's laws. However, the Apostle Paul teaches that no human being will ever be justified by keeping God's law. For more information, **read Romans 3, starting at verse 21**.

- READ **Romans 3:21-24**.

"But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. [22] This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] <u>and are justified freely by his grace</u> through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

- In the New Testament epistle to Titus. In chapter **3:5-7** the Apostle writes: "**he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life**.

- **We must never take this for granted! It is, of course, the opposite of what so many believe!**

- **It is ALL of GRACE! When we consider how desperately wicked and prone to sin, we all are, can it be any other way**?

- James Buchanan wrote. **He says that the best preparation for studying justification by faith is to have a sense of our condition as sinners before God. He writes:**

  - "**The best preparation for the study of this doctrine (referring to justification by faith) is neither great intellectual ability nor much scholastic learning, but a conscience impressed with a sense of our actual condition as sinners in the sight of God.** A deep conviction of the one thing needful in such a terrible state - a conviction of the fact of sin, as an awful reality in our personal experience, of the power of sin, as an inveterate evil cleaving to us continually, and having its roots deep in the innermost recesses of our hearts, and of the guilt of sin, past as well as present, as an offence against God, which, once committed, can never cease to be true of us individually. To study the subject with advantage, we must have a heartfelt interest in it, as one that bears directly on the salvation of our own souls, and this interest can only be felt in proportion as we realize our guilt, misery, and danger, as transgressors of God's Law. "

    - **Do we have this sense of the terrible nature of sin? Do we hate it and grieve over it?**

    - **When we grasp how horrible sin truly is and how offensive it is to God, we see that justification can ONLY be by God's grace and NOT on account of any merit in ourselves!**

God justifies us through or by faith in Christ

- Scripture is abundantly clear. "**Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ**." Romans 5:1

- Scripture never says we are justified because of our faith's inherent goodness, as if our faith had any merit before God!

- **In the order of salvation**, **Scripture teaches that faith precedes Justification**.

- **Galatians 2:16 "know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. <u>So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ</u> and not by observing the law because by observing the law no one will be justified**."

- **Philippians 3:8-9** "**What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ [9] and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. "**

- Once again, justification is never on account of one's faith. **So faith is NOT the foundation of our justification. If it were, faith would be regarded as merit**.

- **The foundation of our justification is the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ! That is appropriated by faith!**

- Murray asks the question, **why is justification by faith alone**? **Any thoughts on that?**

- One answer, and it would be a correct answer, is that it is God's revealed will.

- Beyond that answer, though, Murray lists the following **biblical reasons**.

1. First, if it is by faith, it might be by grace! Remember, even faith itself is a saving grace! We said last week that we believe in Christ for salvation but only by the grace of God.

Romans 4:16: "Therefore it is of faith so that it might be according to grace."

2. Could it also be because faith is the one attitude of our hearts that is the exact opposite of depending upon ourselves?

- After all, faith essentially says, "I give up. I trust you, Lord Jesus, for everything." Faith looks to Christ alone, and it does not trust in ourselves.
- We see once again the wisdom of God!

Summary

- To summarize our study this morning.

- Definition - "Justification is an instantaneous legal act of God in which He views our sins as forgiven, Christ's righteousness as belonging to us, and declares us righteous in His sight.

    1. Justification includes a legal declaration by God.

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What are some practical applications of this great doctrine?

1) It should bring great assurance. **Our standing before God is built upon the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ**. That should give us great hope and joy! There is NO Condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!

2) This great truth gives hope to those who sense their sin and don't know what to do! **We can offer genuine hope to our unbelieving friends and family that there is acceptance with God through the merits of Jesus Christ**.

All praise be to the Savior of sinners, the Lord Jesus Christ! AMEN